Get Rid of Environmental Triggers that Make You Gain Weight

In the last lesson, you learned strategies for dealing with emotional triggers. Besides emotional triggers, do you sometimes feel like external events are interfering with your diet? Maybe you automatically buy a soda and popcorn at the movie theater even though you just ate dinner an hour ago.

Today, you'll discover the environmental triggers that make you want to eat, and learn to overcome them.

Managing Social Triggers

1. **Prepare for the holidays.** The winter holidays are challenging for many people. Endless parties and extra cookies can pack on pounds between November and January. **Develop a plan of action before temptations arise.** Limit yourself to one dessert on Thanksgiving. Perhaps you'll want to workout to burn off those chocolate truffles.

2. **Refocus celebrations.** Of course, there are festivities year round, like birthday parties and networking events. Pay more attention to conversation so you'll make fewer trips to the buffet.

3. **Pass on seconds.** You probably eat more when you're around certain family and friends who encourage overeating. Enjoy their company while you stick to your steamed vegetables.

4. **Welcome support.** On the other hand, think about the neighbor you see jogging each morning or the coworker who brings in a salad for lunch. **Spend more time with healthy role models so their habits will rub off on you.**

Managing Food-Related Triggers

1. **Engage your senses.** Food is about more than flavor. Notice how sight, sound, smell, and touch also cause cravings. Decide if you really want a strawberry shortcake bar or you're just reacting to the music playing on the ice cream truck.

2. **Adjust your vocabulary.** Similarly, some words can make your mouth water. If you love cinnamon, skip the buns and satisfy your taste buds by sprinkling it on plain yogurt.

3. **Clear out the pantry.** Junk food is easier to resist when it is out of your kitchen or at least beyond easy reach. Fill your refrigerator with fruits and vegetables instead of donuts. **If you want to keep some treats around, put them out of sight on a top shelf.**

4. **Eat in more.** Restaurants have made a science out of luring you into eating more with tantalizing menus and hearty portions. Prepare more meals at home. When you eat out, set aside half your plate to take home for another meal. Order grilled fish or whole wheat pasta in tomato sauce with fresh vegetables.

Managing Other Triggers

1. **Change the channel.** Break the habit of snacking in front of the TV. **Aim to go for an hour without eating anything.** Work your way up to watching a whole movie without food or drink.

2. **Check the weather.** A piping hot cup of cocoa with sugar cookies may sound very good when it's snowing outside. A sunny beach may make you long for a margarita and corn chips. Use healthy substitutes year round like herbal tea or popsicles made from fresh fruit.

3. **Release stress.** Do you drive to the nearest fast food place after a tense meeting with your boss? Next time, try relaxing with a warm bath and a novel.

4. **Slow down.** It's easier to make sound decisions when you stop rushing around. Pause for a few seconds before visiting the vending machines at work. You may realize that a handful of nuts are all you need to tide you over until lunch.

5. **Create new bedtime rituals.** The hours before bed can be hazardous to your diet. **Listening to an audio book will lull you to sleep faster than wolfing down leftover Chinese food.**

Learn to eat when you're hungry instead of mindlessly grabbing a bowl of chips because a TV commercial shows a famous athlete munching on them. Tune out environmental triggers and listen to your body. You'll eat less and enjoy your food more.

Sometimes, late in the evening, you might not want to eat because of environmental or emotional triggers, but because you're actually hungry – especially if supper was hours ago. Learn how to cope with late night hunger in the next lesson.

Here's what you need to do today:

Watch a movie! Set a timer and see how long you can go without the chips, ice cream, cookies, or popcorn. If you must give in to the urge to eat something, munch on low-calorie fruits, vegetables, or nuts. A fruit or veggie salad can be delicious, low-calorie, and satisfying!

How long did you go without the junk food?

After today, set your timer each time you're watching TV. Over time, as you get used to TV and movie time without junk food, that timer will inch up longer and longer.